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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 1192  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. U.S.-Israel Relations
- [1](#)3. Iran

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Key stories in the media:  
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Over the weekend the media highlighted the tension between Egypt and

Hizbullah. The media cited EgyptQs claim that Hizbullah sought President Hosni MubarakQs QheadQ and targeted Israeli tourists in the Sinai. The Jerusalem Post quoted Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz (Likud) as saying that Hizbullah chief Hassan Nasrallah had ordered his agents to Qhit Israeli targets,Q and that the hoped that Nasrallah would pay the price for this Qact of war.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Jerusalem does not expect any confrontation with the U.S. when special Middle Envoy George Mitchell arrives on Thursday for his first meeting with PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

Yediot and other media reported that during their meeting next month President Obama will apply pressure on PM Benjamin Netanyahu to adopt the two-state solution. The media reported that yesterday PA President Mahmoud Abbas called Netanyahu with Passover greetings.

HaQaretz reported that JordanQs King Abdullah II is set to visit the White House at the end of the month and will urge President Obama to move ahead with the Arab peace initiative. Abdullah would be the first Middle East leader to meet with Obama in Washington, ahead of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A Jordanian source told HaQaretz that the King would assure Obama of Jordan's commitment to a two-state solution, and would encourage him to support a united Palestinian government.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, in an interview with the ultra-Orthodox radio Kol Hai, President Shimon Peres Qseemed to threatenQ military action against Iran if President ObamaQs overtures to the Islamic Republic fail to bear fruit. Peres also said that that the arrests late last week of a Hizbullah terrorist cell in Egypt was a blow to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

HaQaretz reported that an Egyptian official told the newspaper over the weekend that talks on the release of Gilad Shalit are ongoing.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Northern Ireland politician Gerry Adams told the daily that Hamas is not Al-Qaida or Taliban and that it wants peace.

The electronic media reported that a Palestinian fishing boat carrying a charge of hundreds of kg exploded off the Gaza shore. The security forces believe that a major attack was averted.

The media reported that yesterday police prevented right-wing protesters from reaching the former Gaza settlement bloc of Gush Katif.

The Jerusalem Post quoted a PA official in Ramallah as saying that Egypt has asked Saudi Arabia to exert pressure on President Abbas to accept an Egyptian initiative for solving the continued dispute between Hamas and Fatah. Major media reported that Abbas told representatives of the Quartet that the resumption of the negotiations between the PA and Israel is conditioned on the Netanyahu governmentQs recognition of two states for two peoples.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Saturday senior Israeli defense officials warned that the UN force in southern Lebanon is on its way to QdisintegratingQ, after Poland announced it was withdrawing its troops from the peacekeeping force.

The media reported that Russia has signed a contract to purchase Israeli reconnaissance drones in an attempt to improve its own unmanned aircraft fleet after a poor performance in the war against Georgia last August. The deal, the first-ever purchase announced by

Russia of Israeli military hardware, was signed about three weeks ago by senior Israeli and Russian officials. Israel reportedly hopes the sale to Russia will help dissuade Russia from providing Iran with advanced missile systems.

Maariv reported that the Defense Department is considering cutting back significantly on the development budget for the development of the Arrow 3 missile defense system, due to the global economic crisis. As an alternative, the Americans are proposing their own technology.

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## I. Mideast:

### Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QThe people [of Israel] put their faith in a government that opposes U.S. policy. They shouldn't expect any pats on the back from the Americans.

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet, a former consul in Philadelphia, wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: Q[Netanyahu] has several weeks to begin a correction. He would be wise to get started before he goes to Washington next month.

Former Mossad Director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIf Israel does not [talk with its enemies] itself, we wonQt be surprised if Washington does it before us, without us.

### Block Quotes:

#### I. "If We Give, WeQll Get"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/13): QReciprocity should be the basis of Israel's relations with the international community.... Reciprocity isn't a foreign concept to U.S.-Israeli relations. The Prime Minister may have even learned it from Washington.... Journalist Nahum Barnea reported in Yediot Aharonot last weekend that Netanyahu had a Qcordial and friendlyQ chat with U.S. President Barack Obama. QThe most important question raised was when Obama asked what his political constraints were,Q Barnea wrote, deducing that Obama won't push Netanyahu beyond the liits of his coalition. We have to hope that such a conclusion reflects nothing but the personal whim of the prime minister (or reporter). Netanyahu's political constraints should not interest the leader of the free world any more than those Abbas, Mubarak, or Jordanian King Abdullah are facing. The people put their faith in a government that opposes U.S. policy. They shouldn't expect any pats on the back from the Americans. Reciprocity is a fair concept if not used against a weaker side, and Qpolitical constraintsQ cannot serve as an excuse when used against you by a stronger side.

#### II. "ItQs Not Yvet Lieberman; ItQs Bibi"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet, a former consul in Philadelphia, wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (4/12): QThis is an urgent task for the Prime Minister. The expectations of him are bleak. Only Benjamin Netanyahu can deal with them. Only he is capable of dealing with Bibi.... I tend to believe that Netanyahu understands these basic points and IsraelQs political needs more than he allows himself to admit. If that is really true, he must work for a quick change in his political behavior, even at the cost of an internal crisis. An experienced man such as he must know that there is no alternative to this sort of change. The old Bibi will perhaps hold on for an extended term. The price will be intolerable. He has several weeks to begin a correction. He would be wise to get started before he goes to Washington next month. If he knows enough to say the right things, he may come back to a political battle, but he will clarify that he understands, as he must, what it means to get stuck in compulsive rejectionism. Some naivet may be seen in this recommendation. Israeli politics are cruel. But going blindly toward a groundless goal will be even crueler for Netanyahu. Only rarely has an Israeli prime minister been required to change his ways when he assumed power. Begin did it in his own way. Rabin did too, shortly after he returned for a second term. What is required for that? A great deal: courage and intellectual honesty -- and something of his coincidental tactical skill. Only with them will the new prime minister be capable of carrying out the needed improvement on the old Bibi.

#### III. "From Pakistan to Our Region"

Former Mossad Director Ephraim Halevy wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/13): QA special American team is currently concluding an exceptional journey to Afghanistan and Pakistan... It met commanders of the enemy -- the Taliban -- in the presence of journalists. Among others, a senior Taliban fighter attended the talks; he had spent a few years in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.... The team made the trip from Washington to ask for advice from the Qmoderate among the enemyQ.... There are indications that the U.S. administration is also initiating exceptional moves in other parts of the world.... If Israel does not do this itself, we wonQt be surprised if Washington does it before us, without us.

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12. U.S.-Israel Relations:  
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Summary:  
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Nationally syndicated columnist Douglas Bloomfield wrote from Washington in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: Q[Lieberman] could do what the Arabs and their supporters could only dream of -- drive a wedge between Americans and Israel.

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QThe Israeli ambassador must not be Netanyahu's personal representative to his backers.

Block Quotes:  
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1I. "Might Lieberman Be the Arab WorldQs Best Friend?"

Nationally syndicated columnist Douglas Bloomfield wrote from Washington in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (4/13): Q[Foreign Minister] Lieberman leaves the impression Israel is in full retreat from the peace table. The greater this ex-bouncer's influence, especially regarding relations with the Arabs, the lower Israel's standing will sink. He could do what the Arabs and their supporters could only dream of -- drive a wedge between Americans and Israel. Netanyahu will have an opportunity to set the record straight next month when he is expected in Washington to speak to the AIPAC policy conference and meet with President Obama. He will have to make a convincing case not only to the AIPAC faithful (an easy sell) but to the American people and their president that his government is committed to peace in more than vague rhetoric. The future of pro-Israel activism and the quality of the bilateral relationship could depend on it.

II. "Whose Ambassador Is He Anyway?"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/13): QEven if Netanyahu and Lieberman divide [IsraelQs representative to the] world between themselves, the West to one and the East to the other.... Netanyahu still has the burden of deciding. As a wary politician, he may prefer loyalty over skill. Political loyalty means identifying with the party line, but more importantly, it's personal.... In any case, the influence of the ambassador in Washington depends on how close people think he is to the powers that be in Jerusalem, and he will be tested on this constantly. No one will heed an ambassador Netanyahu bypasses, while maintaining relations through private mediators, American or Israeli. Netanyahu will be forced to find new powers to say no to the wealthy American Jews who have showered him with spiritual and material support. They will lobby him to appoint an ambassador close to them as well. Fears about outside influences must concern the committee that approves all senior public service appointments. This committee was established after the failure of Netanyahu's first government -- specifically the appointment of Roni Bar-On as attorney general. The Israeli ambassador must not be Netanyahu's personal representative to his backers.

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13. Iran:  
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Summary:  
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The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QIsrael is entitled to view Obama's policy with skepticism.... [Yet,] it would behoove us to stand by the President of the U.S. and hope that he reroutes Iran onto a course that does not threaten Israel or any other country.

Block Quotes:

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"Dialogue Is Preferable"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/12): QThe President of the U.S. brings tidings of a new strategy aimed at neutralizing the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.... [Unlike George W. Bush,] Barack Obama is not adopting a patronizing policy of diktats and ultimatums; he understands he is dealing with a country that views itself as a regional power. This policy can serve both Western and U.S. interests. Israel is entitled to view Obama's policy with skepticism. From its standpoint, Iran does not only constitute a nuclear threat.... Yet in examining its options, Israel cannot ensure that an attack would thwart Iran's nuclear program.... Even if it is possible to have faith in its military capabilities, Israel's home front has clearly become the real arbiter of victory or defeat. Israel thus needs to be satisfied, welcome Obama's initiative and praise his efforts to rule out the need for a military operation. Statements by the Prime Minister that Israel does not oppose Iranian-American dialogue signal he understands this. It would behoove us to stand by the President of the U.S. and hope that he reroutes Iran onto a course that does not threaten Israel or any other country.

CUNNINGHAM